NAXOS

Laureate Series • Cello

DDD

8.554356

SCHUMANN
BEETHOVEN
SCHUBERT
MENDELSSOHN
POPPER

Hai-Ye Ni, Cello
Winner of the 1996 Paulo Cello Competition

Hélène Jeanney, Piano

Robert Schumann (1810-1856): Fantasiestücke, Op. 73

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Seven Variations on 'Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen' from Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, WoO46

Franz Schubert (1797-1828): Sonata in A minor, D.821, "Arpeggione"

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847): Cello Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 58

David Popper (1843-1913): Elfentanz, Op. 39

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy knew both material and cultural privilege, though neither could adequately explain the phenomenal musical gifts he demonstrated during childhood. Brought up in a stimulating intellectual ambience in Berlin, where his family moved from Hamburg soon after his birth, both he and his sister Fanny received every encouragement in their artistic and intellectual endeavours. As a boy Mendelssohn was taught by Carl Zelter, who introduced him to Goethe in Weimar, and when little more than a child composed a succession of works of misleading maturity, twelve *String Symphonies*, the *Octet*, and a concert overture, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* among them, which, in their formal precision and melodic genius represent some of the most astonishing creations of any adolescent composer.

Of Mendelssohn's three works for cello and piano, two were written for his younger brother Paul, a talented performer, who followed his father by becoming a banker. The earliest of the three, the beguiling yet wonderfully assured *Variations Concertantes, Op. 17*, dates from 1827, when Paul Mendelssohn was fourteenth. Eleven years later, Mendelssohn returned to the medium, producing the first of his two cello sonatas, the *Sonata in B flat major, Op. 45*, once again for his brother. The second sonata, included here, was written in the final period of Mendelssohn's intense yet prematurely curtailed creative life. Altogether more robust and imposing than its predecessor, the *Sonata in D major, Op. 58* is among Mendelssohn's finest creations. Composed in 1843, it received its first public performance in London two years later, played by the celebrated Italian virtuoso Alfredo Piatti and the composer. The jubilant opening movement, marked *Allegro assai vivace*, is in regular sonata form, and begins with a forthright, emphatic motif, not unlike the beginning of Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony*. The B minor *Allegretto scherzando* has the light-footed fairy mercurial quality of several earlier works and features much pizzicato writing for the

cello. The G major *Adagio* develops arpeggiated piano chords as a chorale, upon which the cello reflects in sonorous and impassioned recitative, before the *Finale, Molto allegro e vivace*, rounds off the work in heady triumph.

Beethoven's works for cello and piano appear in each of his creative phases, beginning with his *Opus 5 Sonatas* in 1796 and culminating in the monumental two sonatas that from Opus 102 in 1815, the first works of his so-called later period. Of his three variation sets for cello and piano, only the last, included here, falls within the new century. In 1801, Emanuel Schikaneder had opened his impressive new Theater an der Wien, realising his long-held ambitions. The following year he staged there a new production of the opera which he had written with Mozart and with which his own name and the decoration of his new Theatre was associated, *Die Zauberflöte*. In the ten years since the first performance the work had been performed two hundred times and most recently for the first time, in 1801, at the Court Opera. The opera's remarkable popularity found Beethoven turning to its again for a variation work, as he had with his set of twelve variations on Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen, in 1796. This second set of Mozart variations falls mid-way between the sonatas of *Opus 5*, and *Opus 69*, in 1807. The *Andante* theme is shared between the two instruments during the first four variations, in which the tempo remains constant, but the note lengths are varied. In the fifth variation the pulse provides effective contrast with the *Adagio* of the sixth. The final treatment of the theme, marked *Allegro, ma non troppo*, is memorable for an extended coda including a new theme in C minor.

David Popper, the 'Liszt of the Cello', enjoyed a sensational career as a virtuoso, and his numerous studies and pedagogical works may be said to have systematically modernised cello technique. Popper served as solo cellist of the Vienna Court Orchestra between 1868 and 1873, and was married to the pianist Sophie Menter, perhaps Liszt's greatest protégée. Of Popper's many compositions, which includes several concertos, a set of caprices, numerous characteristic miniatures, and a superb *Requiem* for cello ensemble, the dazzling *Elfentanz, Op. 39*, is perhaps the best known; its timeless appeal as a bravura *morceau de concert* remains undiminished.

Robert Schumann composed what is generally considered to be the first great Romantic concerto for cello, the *Concerto in A minor, Op. 129*, in a mere two weeks in the autumn of 1850, shortly after assuming the position of director of music in Düsseldorf, at the suggestion of Ferdinand Hiller, who had preceded him there. He was by no means a stranger to the

instrument, having attempted it himself when muscular weakness forced him to abandon all hope of becoming a piano virtuoso. During 1849, Schumann had written three works which have become standard elements in the cello recital repertory, though curiously only in the case of the five *Stücke im Volkston* (Pieces in Folk-Song Style), was the cello the composer's prescribed first choice. His *Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70*, was originally conceived as a virtuoso show-piece for the newly perfected valve-horn, while the *Drei Fantasiestücke, Op. 73*, included on this recording were originally intended for clarinet and piano. Today both works are heard almost exclusively in their cello and piano versions.

The manuscript of Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* is dated 11th and 12th February 1849, while the *Adagio and Allegro* was ready by 14th February, and the former work was played privately a week later by the Dresden clarinettist Johann Kotte, with Clara Schumann. From the direction attacca found at the end of the first two of these ternary-form pieces, we may conclude that Schumann devised the work as a continuous three-section suite. Nonetheless, the character of each is emphatically defined. The first piece, *Zart und mit Ausdruck* (Tender and with expression), *in A minor*, is nostalgic and contemplative; the second, Lebhaft, leicht (Lively, light) is relaxed and sun-lit, while the final section, *Rasch und mit Feuer* (Bold and with fire) is powerfully assured and vigorous. The second and third are both in A major, and feature extended codas.

Franz Schubert, the great song-writer of the Western art music, was idolised by Schumann, yet despite the glorious cello writing found in many of his chamber works, notably in the great *String Quintet in C major, D.956*, his name is linked with just one substantial composition for this instrument, and then only by default. Schubert's only addition to cello literature is a masterwork, indelibly touched by his sublime genius. The *Sonata in A minor, D.821*, was written in 1823 for the recently invented arpeggione, a bowed hybrid of guitar and cello with six strings and a finger-board with 24 frets, devised by the Viennese instrument-maker Johann Georg Staufer. History records the existence of a single arpeggionist of note, one Vincenz Schuster, a virtuoso performer, who wrote the only known tutor for his instrument, which was engraved and published by the firm of Diabelli. That Schuster's treatise was issued by an influential publisher keenly aware of market forces and eager to satisfy public demand suggests that, for a time, at least, the arpeggione was very much in vogue, at least in Vienna. Today, however, this instrument is remembered only in the context of the magnificent sonata which Schubert wrote at Schuster's behest. Although

universally known as the *Arpeggione Sonata*, the work is most often heard played by the cello, although an alternative transcription for viola and piano is essential element in the repertoire of that instrument.

The sonata is in three movements, the *Adagio* and final *Rondo*, an *Allegretto*, being linked. The opening *Allegro moderato*, in tripartite sonata-form, begins according to custom, with the piano presenting the first subject idea, before it is taken up and extended by the cello. A more mobile second group follows, with lively exchanges between the instruments. Both main ideas are further explored throughout various keys during the development. A brief cadenza announces the recapitulation, and the movement ends in grave A minor solemnity. The *Adagio*, suggesting a *Song without Words*, reveals Schubert's vocal mastery transformed to magical effect. Indeed, it would be difficult to contemplate a melody more ideally suited to the cello. This leads directly into the *Rondo* finale. The recurring main idea, another characteristically singable Schubertian theme in the tonic major, is counterbalanced throughout the movement by an acerbic D minor episode recalling the rhythm of the opening movement's main *Allegro*. In the middle of the movement, a new counter-melody emerges before the previous D minor idea returns, this time in A minor, anticipating an enharmonic return of the Rondo theme in the major. A graceful coda completes one of Schubert's happiest inspirations.

Michael Jameson

Hai-Ye Ni

The Chinese cellist Hai-Ye Ni made her acclaimed New York début at Alice Tully Hall in 1991. Born in Shanghai in 1972, she was taught first by her mother, before entering the Shanghai Conservatory. She continued her studies at San Francisco Conservatory, at the Juilliard School in New York and with William Pleeth in London. Her career has been marked by a series of triumphs in international competitions, from Hamburg, where she was the youngest cellist ever to receive the first prize, to the Sixth Rostropovich International Competition in Paris in 1997, where she came first among 96 entrants, playing, in the final round, Henri Dutilleux's concerto *Tout un monde lointain* . . . and earning special praise from Rostropovich himself. She has appeared throughout the world as a soloist and recitalist, including a critically acclaimed performance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and

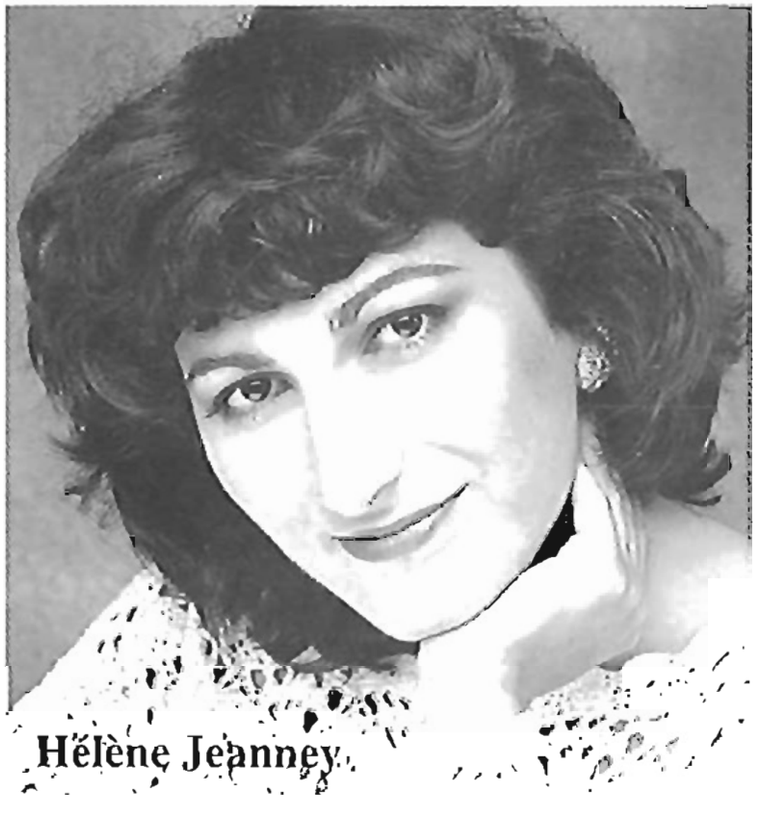
Christoph Eschenbach. Hai-Ye Ni has also broadcast widely on radio and television, and pursues her chamber music interests as a member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre II and has been helped by the guidance of Yo-Yo Ma, who has taken a keen interest in her progress over the years.

Hélène Jeanney

Hélène Jeanney was born in Paris, where she studied at the Conservatoire, following this with further study at the Salzburg Mozarteum, the Banff Centre of Fine Arts and Indiana University. She received her Artist Diploma at this last in 1992, having served there as assistant to her teacher, Menahem Pressler, and also completed the professional Studies Program at the Juilliard School in New York, under the guidance of Jerome Lowenthal. She has won a series of important international prizes, from the award of Second Prize in the Alfred Cortot Competition in Milan in 1979 to First Prize in 1991 in the New York East and West Artists Audition, followed by a recital in Carnegie Hall. She enjoys an active career as a recitalist, in chamber music and as a concerto soloist, with appearances that have taken her to Russia, to centres throughout Europe and to performances with the Paris National Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, the New World Symphony and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

Hai-Ye Ni

Photo by Beryl Towbin



Hélène Jeanney

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Playing Time 71:17

Hai-Ye Ni, Cello
Hélène Jeanney, Piano

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
Fantasiestücke, Op. 73 *(10:50)*

1	Zart und mit Ausdruck	*3:06*
2	Lebhaft, leicht	*3:28*
3	Rasch und mit Feuer	*4:14*

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
Seven Variations on Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen from Mozart's Die Zauberflöte, WoO46 *(9:50)*

4	Theme: Andante	*0:53*
5	Variation I	*0:42*
6	Variation II	*0:48*
7	Variation III	*1:03*
8	Variation IV	*1:32*
9	Variation V	*0:37*
10	Variation VI: Adagio	*2:16*
11	Variation VII: Allegro ma non troppo	*1:59*

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)
Sonata in A minor, D.821 "Arpeggione" *(21:30)*

12	Allegro moderato	*8:10*
13	Adagio	*3:58*
14	Allegretto	*9:20*

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)
Sonata in D major, Op.58 *(25:49)*

15	Allegro assai vivace	*7:52*
16	Allegretto scherzando	*5:29*
17	Adagio	*5:00*
18	Molto allegro e vivace	*7:20*

David POPPER (1843-1913)

19	Elfentanz, Op. 39	*3:00*

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